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ABSTRACT

The benefits of using drama as a teaching technique became evident in the Work Orientation program at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center when a team of teachers presented two plays for their lower-level students. Students enjoyed the activity and were able to discuss work-related problems freely. As a result, the students' self esteem was enhanced. The dramatization and preparations for it can be done by teachers, students, or both, and can address common issues such as being a housewife in a strange country or employment problems. Group discussions following the dramatization encourage and assist participants in analyzing problems and formulating strategies for solving those problems. Although classroom drama requires full commitment from the teacher or teachers, the benefits are well worth the time needed for the planning, performance, and follow-up discussion. (MSE)

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DRAMATIZATION AS A TEACHING TECHNIQUE IN WORK ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

Susan Jane Barcinas and Maria Dolores Gozar

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Editorial Staff

Galang - Linda Schneider
Bataan - John Marston
Phanat Nikhom - Dory Bayer
Manila - Douglas Gilzow
Washington, D.C. - Donald A. Ranard

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

The D-E Work Orientation Pilot Program in Phanat Nikhom *by Gregory Williams* 6

Letters from Eastern European Refugees *by Kathryn Solon, with Peter Havlicek, Ana-Maria Tana, and Gregor Zalewski* 10

Yes, They Can *by Deborah L. Schaffer* 15

Clinic Simulation *by Jonathan Wheeler* 18

Child Care Center *by Somthavil "Boom" Klinmahorm* 21

"Thank You for Working with Me": Experiment in Cooperative Learning *by Sally Ringdahl, Hiroe Kobayashi, Silverus Chan, Mena Facunla, Evelyn Ibasco, Milagros Javier, and Elizabeth Moreno* 26

Wordplay: A Poetry Workshop by Jean McConochie at Bataan *by Douglas Gilzow* 30

A Refugee Family, *a photo essay by Julius Peter Obligación* 32

A Week in Woonsocket *by Sinith ("Aood") Sitthiraksa* 36

The Cultural Assimilation of Indochinese Refugees *by Kathleen Corey* 41

What Should I Do Next? Learning to Seek Clarification on the Job *by J. B. Unggul Djatmika* 44

Easing the Transition: Teaching Migrants in the Orderly Departure Program *by Marian Webster and Susan Belmont* 46

The Listening Puzzle: A Multi-Purpose Listening Exercise for Advanced ESL Classes *by Erlinda Benavidez* 52

Dramatization as a Teaching Technique in Work Orientation *by Susan Jane Barcinas and Maria Dolores Gozar* 54

Attitudes, Values, and Life Skills: An Approach to Cultural Orientation *by David Ancel* 58

An Introduction to the Cham: Muslim Refugees from Vietnam *by Carl L. Bankston III* 60

DEPARTMENTS

Letters 4

Update 4

Dramatization as a Teaching Technique in Work Orientation

Susan Jane Barcinas and Maria Dolores Gozar
Philippine Refugee Processing Center

The benefits of using drama as a teaching technique became evident in the Work Orientation (WO) component at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center when a team of teachers presented two plays for their A- and B-level classes. Students enjoyed the activity. They were able to discuss work-related problems freely, and their self-esteem was enhanced. Although classroom drama requires full commitment from the teacher, the benefits are well worth the time needed for the planning, performance, and follow-up discussion.

Every teacher looks for activities that are effective, fun, and creative. A team of teachers in the Work Orientation (WO) component at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) has found that using drama in the classroom is an interesting alternative way of helping lower-level students master the competencies in the WO curriculum. They encouraged students to analyze and react to problems presented in the scenes and to formulate strategies they would use to cope with those problems.

Presenting the Drama

An expansion of the role play, dramatization has characterization, conflict, and theme as its basic elements and requires planning and preparation before presentation. While the role play is a single situation presented spontaneously, dramatization is a thoroughly prepared series of situations that develop a general theme.

How does a teacher maximize the effective use of dramatization while minimizing long hours of planning and preparation? First of all, the script should be flexible in terms of setting, casting, and props. The play should be suitable for performing in the classroom, audiovisual room, or anywhere a stage can be set up. Second, casting can be done from a pool of teachers, supervisors, refugee assistant teachers, and students. Last, homemade props can be substituted for realia, if resources are scarce.

There are several ways of presenting the drama:

1. A teacher can do this activity with one class of students, using each scene as a 40-60 minute daily activity, complete with competencies, learner objectives, and follow-up activities. For example, since the topic "Work at Home" usually takes four or five class days, the teacher can read and discuss one of the four scenes each day. On the last day, the students can enact the whole drama, with the teacher providing cues as needed.
2. Dramatization can also be done using a team approach among a group of teachers and their students. All the scenes can be acted by teachers, who will afterwards lead the follow-up activities with their combined classes. This can be the final activity for a specific topic, and the follow-up activities can serve as an assessment device for the teachers. The team of teachers who act out scenes learn to share ideas and talents, and the bond among team members is strengthened.
3. The dramatization can also be performed by the students themselves with the guidance of the teacher. It can be used as a one-hour daily activity in which students practice the language while acting out scenes. When students are acting in the dramatization, grammatical accuracy

is not required. Students are expected only to communicate meaning. When they have fully mastered every scene, they can present the play to another class of students, with the teachers conducting a variety of follow-up activities along with each scene.

By using drama in instruction, teachers and students discover that they have talent in writing, staging, or acting. In addition, acting out scenes helps bolster refugees' confidence in speaking a foreign language publicly and promotes their overall feelings of self-worth. Even shy students can take part in music or prop preparations.

WO teachers first presented an instructional play entitled, "You're Hired; You're Fired," about acceptable and unacceptable work habits and attitudes. After observing the play, the students were able to distinguish a good worker from a bad one and discussed which situations they thought were likely to occur to them in the U.S. The discussion following each of the dramatized scenes generated a lot of spontaneous language. An atmosphere was created where students felt comfortable about communicating real ideas and feelings – not just mechanical phrases learned in the classroom.

Sample Script: "Refugee Housewife Blues"

Since the results of our first drama activity were encouraging, the team tried out another script, written by WO supervisor Dolores Gozar, "Refugee Housewife Blues," which tackled competencies under the WO curriculum topic, "Work at Home." The story is about a Vietnamese refugee housewife, newly arrived in the U.S. and still adjusting to her new home. The first scene demonstrates her lack of confidence in dealing with strangers and her inability to use the telephone. The following are parts of the first and second scenes and the activities designed to accompany them.

Scene I

Synopsis

A Vietnamese housewife is left alone in her apartment for the first time. She feels depressed and afraid. A stranger knocks at the door, but she doesn't let him in. She calls her husband, but she can't reach him. She gets a wrong number and doesn't know what to say. Steve McBride, Hoang's friend, calls later that afternoon but she cannot take the message from him. She ends up feeling sorry for herself.

Materials

- Sofa, telephone, embroidery materials

WO Competencies

- Ask for and give information
- Apply problem-solving skills
- Acknowledge understanding or lack of understanding
- Ask for assistance and advice.

Learner Objectives

To be able to:
1. use the appropriate language when dealing with strangers
2. use the telephone correctly
3. respond appropriately in a telephone conversation

Sample Dialogue

(Mai sits on the sofa, embroidering, and looking very depressed because she is homesick. She is also very apprehensive, since she is alone in her apartment.)

Mai: Oh, I miss Vietnam. If the communists hadn't come, my life would be very happy. I miss my big house, big garden, old friends. Where are they now? (cries silently) My house – I mean apartment – is very small. No friends come here. I'm the only one in the house. My husband goes to work – I am new in the neighborhood. No friends. I'm sad and afraid. (There is a knock at the door. Mai wipes her tears and looks through the door.)

Salesman: Good morning! May I come in?

Mai: No . . . I . . . I . . .

Salesman: I sure would appreciate it if you could give me a minute or two. You see, I'm . . .

Mai: (interrupting) No . . . Go, please . . .

Salesman: Oh, well, I'm just wondering . . . maybe you'd like to try some new cleaning supplies for your kitchen . . .

Mai: (nervously) Just . . . a minute. I'll call my husband. (runs to the telephone and dials frantically while the salesman waits in wonder)

Salesman: Ma'am? (continuously knocking) Where are you? Ma'am? (Mai dials again.)

Man's voice: Hello?

Mai: Hello! Is Hoang there?

Man's voice: I'm sorry, you got the wrong number.

Mai: Oh . . . sorry . . . (Mai puts down the phone and runs back to the door.)

Mai: Mr. . . . I can't talk English . . . Please go . . . go away!

Salesman: (in desperation) Oh . . . OK.

Follow-Up Activities

1. Questions:
   - Who are the people in the story?
   - What is Mai's work?
   - Can you describe her? Why did you describe her in that way?
   - What happened to Mai? What was her problem?
   - Did she talk to the salesman? Why?
   - Would you do the same as Mai? Why or why not?
   - Was Mai able to call her husband? Why or why not?
   - If you were Mai, what would you do?
2. Ask students to show how they would deal with the stranger. Discuss why.
3. To probe more deeply, ask other students to show how they will deal with the following people who come to their house:
   a) a water or electric meter reader
   b) a mailman delivering a package
   c) a policeman who wants to talk to a member of the family
   d) missionaries or religious persons visiting the family
   e) sons' and daughters' friends and acquaintances who visit the house
   f) hoodlums who try to break in

Scene II

Synopsis

The next day, Mai gets ready to cook, but as she sorts through the grocery bag, she realizes she bought some wrong products. Her husband, Hoang, sees her frustration and promises to do the shopping for her until she learns. Hoang asks her to specify clearly her kitchen needs and the amounts needed. He teaches her how to read the labels for contents and quantities.

Materials

- Kitchen utensils
- Weighing scale
- 1 can of Crisco cooking oil with a chicken on the label
- 1 bottle of detergent with a lemon on the label

Competencies

- Ask for and give clarification
- Report problems and state reasons for problems
- Measure length, volume, temperature, weight, and time, using standard tools and American units of measurement
- Use math
- Use the alphabet

Learner Objectives

To be able to:

1. read labels (names and amounts of items)
2. specify market needs, i.e., identify the items and amounts of each to be purchased
3. check if the purchase is correct in terms of specified items and their amounts, pricing, economy, etc.
4. show confidence in seeking assistance while buying items
5. locate items needed in a grocery store after seeking assistance from salesperson

Sample Dialogue

Mai: Oh no! Wrong! I saw a chicken outside, but there's no chicken inside, only oil . . . Oh! wrong again! I thought lemon juice. But no lemon juice inside – only dish soap. I saw a lemon outside. The supermarket is a big problem for me. I don't like going to the supermarket any more. But I cook every day. What do I do?

Hoang: (entering) What's the matter? Why are you sad, Mai?

Mai: I made mistakes again. I buy wrong. I don't like to go to the supermarket anymore.

Hoang: Don't worry. Tomorrow is Saturday. I'll go with you to the store so I can show you how to buy. How much chicken do you need?

Mai: I need a one-kilo chicken.

Hoang: One-kilo chicken is the same as 2.2 pounds, or two pounds and about three ounces. Here. (Shows it at the weighing scale.)

Mai: Pound? Not kilo?

Hoang: Here in America, the pound is used most of the time, not the kilogram.

Mai: I don't know how to read pounds.

Hoang: Here, look at this label. (Shows a grocery item with "lb." on the label.) The "lb." here means "pound."

Mai: Ah, lb., pound . . . Oh! Hoang, I also need one cup lemon juice.

Hoang: One cup lemon juice? That's the same as eight ounces. (Shows sample label again.) So if you read on the label "8 oz.," that is the same as one cup. OK?

Mai: Now I understand.

Hoang: Mai, when you go shopping, be sure you read the labels carefully.

Mai: But if I don't understand very well?

Hoang: You can ask the American salesman.

Mai: Is it okay if I ask, "Is there chicken inside?" "Is this the same as one cup?"

Hoang: (laughs) Yes, you can do that.

Mai: Oh, Hoang! Can you show me how to use the oven again? I want to bake a cake. I forgot how to use it already, and you know how afraid I am to use the appliances.

Hoang: (Shows Mai the steps in using the oven.) First, pre-heat the oven . . . .

(The scene ends with Mai showing an understanding of the whole procedure.)

Follow-Up Activities

1. Questions
   - What happened to Mai?
   - What was her problem?
   - Who helped her?
   - Who taught her how to buy correctly in a supermarket?
2. The teacher calls three students to stand in front of the audience, gives each a grocery item, and asks them to identify what's inside the cans or boxes and what it is used for. What is the price of each item? What is the weight of the item?

The teacher calls a student to act out asking for assistance in a supermarket. Another student demonstrates the procedure for operating the oven, step by step.

Future Plans for Drama in Work Orientation

The casting of the first two instructional plays performed at WO was from a pool of teachers who performed for only one group of students. Later, drama was presented as a team activity, with an entire team of teachers working together to present a play for their combined classes. As this article is being written, WO teachers are preparing a dramatization to be performed entirely by students.

Eventually the teachers and administrative staff of the WO component hope to rely on students – rather than teachers and refugee assistant teachers – for script writing, directing, and casting. We plan to ask students to create their own plots about American work situations. Teachers and refugee assistant teachers will provide only the minimum needed direction, translation, or guidance in choosing appropriate language for the situations and scenes. In the process of writing their own scripts, students will apply their knowledge of asking and giving information, clarifying, reporting task progress, describing procedures, identifying problems, and providing solutions. In rehearsing the scenes, students will develop the ability to work both independently and as a part of the team. They can make decisions about how to make the scenes as entertaining and realistic as possible. Thus, the teacher who uses the WO drama puts the students in a work situation – working on a work drama.

***Susan Jane Barcinas** has been a teacher in the Work Orientation (WO) component at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center since 1985. She has three years of previous teaching experience and has participated in theater and drama associations for several years. She edited and directed the WO play Housewife Blues. She is a candidate for a master's degree in economics from Ateneo University in Manila.*

***Maria Dolores Gozar** has been a teacher in the Work Orientation component at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center since 1985. Previously, she taught English at the Vietnamese Refugee Center at Palawan, in the southern Philippines. Gozar holds a BA in English from Philippine Women's University.*